

Fighting Temptation - Grumbling against God

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In 1946, the musical *Annie Get Your Gun* first hit the stages of Broadway. One of the most popular songs from this musical is “Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better.” The main thought of this song is simple. If you can do something, I’ll do it better, faster, louder, stronger... you get the idea! This feeling of pride and a lack of contentment with what someone else does can often lead to grumbling that person behind their back.

This morning, our text shows us that our sinful nature tempts us to grumble against God, to treat with contempt those God has put in authority. Even in the face of our stubborn discontent, our Savior loved us, and followed the will of the Father without ever grumbling, even up to death on the cross. This love of Jesus becomes the motivation for us to fight the temptation to grumble against God.

I. Korah, Dathan and Abiram Grumble against God

Our text this morning begins in the middle of the story of Israel’s rebellion, and so we may need some context to understand what is going on. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, three Israelite men, were not happy with the way things are going. In verse three of chapter sixteen they say to Moses, **“You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?”** If this had been a private matter, with only these three men rebelling against Moses, it’s possible it could have been solved behind closed tent flaps. But these three were not alone. They had also convinced 250 men to join them in their grumbling. And these weren’t 250 guys who were sitting around their tents with nothing to do. They were all leaders in the community!

So when these leaders in the community come to Moses, When Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram to speak to them about their grumbling, their response was this. **Isn’t it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you also want to lord it over us!** They were not happy with Moses, the one the Lord had appointed to lead them. As we already heard in verse three, they thought that Moses wasn’t leading them well, and that they were just as worthy to lead.

However, these three were not just grumbling against Moses as the Lord’s anointed leader. They were grumbling against God himself. The promises of God were not enough for them. They were not content to wait for God to fulfill his promise. They wanted him to do things their way, in their time.

How did Moses respond to this? What would someone say in the face of this large uprising against himself and the Lord? He doesn’t try to argue with them or convince them that he was the Lord’s appointed leader. He simply tells them what the LORD commanded him. Moses tells Dathan, Abiram and all their followers to each bring a censer to burn incense before the Lord the following day. Fast forward 24 hours, and the 250 men have come before God with incense. The LORD warns Moses, and Moses says to the rest of the Israelites, **“Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.”** But that’s not all that Moses says. So they didn’t think Moses was truly God’s leader? Well, the LORD would demonstrate who was right. (vs 28-30) In verse thirty, Moses tells the people that God’s going to do something “new.” God’s going to make something happen that only he could do.

As soon as Moses finished speaking, the ground opened up, and Korah and all that belonged to him, along with most of his family, were swallowed up by the earth. But the 250 leaders who had gone along with Korah’s rebellion did not go unpunished. God also rained down fire from heaven, which consumed them where they stood. God’s justice was swift. He would not let the sin of grumbling against the Lord’s Anointed go unpunished.

II. Our Own Grumbling

Do we sometimes struggle with grumbling? Is it also difficult for us to be content and wait for God to fulfill his promises? We want to say that we never do this. We even want to fight against this temptation, but our sinful nature is always there tempting us, always trying to pull us away from our trust in God. Satan wants us to think that God isn’t keeping his promises if we can’t see, feel, touch or experience them in some way.

God promises that he works all things for the good of those who love him, but the devil wants us to think, “Does he really? Can God really use such sinful things for his good? I thought he could do better than this?” This doubt leads to a lack of contentment, being ok with the way things are going, and so we want to grumble and complain about God’s appointed leaders.

Just like Korah and his followers, we grumble against those whom God has put in authority over us. Ever complain about our leaders in the government? It’s tempting to think, “God how could you allow them to do this? What they’re doing isn’t right. Why would you do this to us? We deserve something better?”

This grumbling and discontent can also extend to the leaders in the church, whether it’s the pastor or elders or church council, or even someone who leads a church event. If things aren’t done the way we want them to go, our sinful nature sees a chance to strike. Grumbling and gossiping go hand and hand, and both are effective at spreading lies and winning many over to a cause. This simple temptation can lead to so much damage, and Satan loves that. But who put those people in a position to lead? Against whom are we grumbling against when we say and think these things?

God is the one who has put people in positions of authority. He is responsible for those who serve as president and senators, pastors and teachers. When we grumble against these leaders, we’re grumbling against God’s Anointed One, Jesus. If that doesn’t show us how serious this sin is, then what will?

St. Paul in our second lesson warns us against grumbling and its eternal consequences. **And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.** What is the result of ignoring these warnings? Like Korah, we will be swallowed up, but not by the ground. On the Last Day, if we continue in this sin of grumbling and rejecting God, then our sins will condemn us to an eternity in the depths of hell. There, we’ll be consumed by unending fire, our bodies never wasting away in the constant pain and torment.

III. Jesus Lack of Grumbling

We certainly deserve this eternal punishment because of our lack of contentment, but thankfully our Savior, the Lord’s Anointed, has saved us from this punishment. Instead of judgment, he has shown us love!

If anyone had a reason to grumble, it was Jesus. He had wandered through the desert for 40 days without food, been threatened with death by King Herod, persecuted, rejected and grumbled against during his whole ministry. Yet through all of this, Jesus continued to love us. He continued to follow the will of His Father without ever grumbling or complaining. He was content, knowing that God was going all of these sinful people to accomplish the plan for salvation!

Jesus respected those whom God had put in authority in the government. The Pharisees tried to trip Jesus up with taxes and offerings, but Jesus simply responds, **“Give to Caesars what is Caesars, and to God what is God’s.”** He showed love to the leaders of the church. Even though the Pharisees’ goal was always to discredit, and eventually kill Jesus, he continued to teach them the error of their ways, and to bring them back to the truth out of love! He never once grumbled against the Father, even when he was asked to take the sins of the whole world on his shoulders and die on the cross in our place. This saving work of Jesus was also “something new.” It was only something he, as God, could do!

The victory Jesus won is what changes our hearts and attitudes. He gives us the strength to fight the temptation to grumble against God, and to respond to sinful leaders with love and contentment. Through the love and faith that Jesus has given us, we see that God truly is in control of all things, that he can even use flawed government officials and sinful leaders in the church! We may not see how he does this, but we can be content to sit and wait as God works it all for his good, and for the good of those who love him.

Even as we are tempted to think, “I can do anything better than you,” our lesson reminds us today that there is no need to think that way. We already have it all. God has provided the government to protect us and keep order and strive for peace. He has given us leaders in the church to provide and care for our spiritual needs. He sent his Son, Jesus, to die for our sins of grumbling, and to bring us to faith in him. May he keep us strong in our fight against the devil, knowing that we stand firm on the rock-solid foundation of faith in his sacrifice. Amen.